

Markus Wolfien

Institute for Medical Informatics and Biometry, Medical Faculty and University Hospital

Carl Gustav Carus, TUD Dresden University of Technology

GMDS Section Medical Bioinformatics & Systems Biology

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Medizinische Informatik, Biometrie und Epidemiologie (GMDS) e.V.

The Invisible Part of My CV

On rejected grant proposals, panel decisions, and what comes next

gmds

Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Medizinische Informatik,
Biometrie und
Epidemiologie e.V.

What my CV shows, and what it leaves out

11

Proposals funded:
these are on my CV

13

not funded:
the invisible part

de.STAIR BMBF 2017-22	GB-XMap BMBF 2018-20	iRhythmics ESF 2019-22	Carpe digitale Univ. Rostock 2021-22	OLCIR BMBF 2023-27	German Medical Text Corpus BMBF 2023-26
Personalized Medicine for Oncology BMBF 2023-26	Synthetic Data (ScaDS.AI) BMBF 2023-25	SPIZ G-BA 2023-27	Synthetic Data (ScaDS.AI) BMFTR 2026-28	Mutation in Radiation BMFTR 2026-29	AIPACA BMBF 2022
SENSE EU 2025					

The visible CV presents a coherent career. The invisible CV probably explains more about how that career actually developed.

What a proposal hides

EU Project SENSE

European doctoral network

Oncology

Sensory
neurophysiology

Psychology

Nutrition

Data
science

14

doctoral projects designed,
negotiated and planned, with
academic and non-academic partners

DC1

DC2

DC3

DC4

DC5

DC6

DC7

DC8

DC9

DC10

DC11

DC12

DC13

DC14

*+ months of coordination before a single line was
evaluated*



**A rejection does not
arrive only in your
inbox.**

It reaches everyone who
invested time in the idea:
coordinators, partners,
supervisors, and fourteen
doctoral positions that never
opened.

80.3%

Above threshold

Below the funding line

Praise, followed by “however”

First reading: the praise

- ✓ *“clearly presented and relevant for the cancer field”*
- ✓ *“overall integration generally convincing”*
- ✓ *“a coherent and convincing mixture of contributions”*
- ✓ *“Open science practices are well considered”*
- ✓ *“thoroughly presented, coherent with the stated scientific objectives”*

Second reading: the “however”

AMBITION

“The proposal satisfactorily demonstrate[s] that it goes beyond the state of the art, **however** the ambition is limited due to the narrow focus on sensory alterations and oral symptoms.”

CREDIBILITY

“The overall methodological approach is described in broad terms; **however**, the in-depth details are insufficiently specified.”

DEMONSTRATION

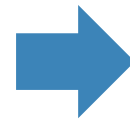
“The scientific impacts are well-structured, **however** their magnitude is not fully convincing.”

The praise established quality. The **“howevers”** show where points were lost.

Can funding science also slow science down?

In his satire **The Mark Gable Foundation**, Leo Szilard imagined that scientific progress could be slowed – not by prohibiting research, but by occupying researchers with funding, applications and committees.

The rejected proposal disappears.



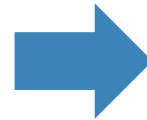
The time, relationships and intellectual work it consumed **remain invisible.**

Leo Szilard, "The Mark Gable Foundation" (written 1948), in The Voice of the Dolphins and Other Stories (1961).

Scientific quality is not yet selection confidence

SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT

**Is the proposal
scientifically sound?**



SELECTION DECISION

**Can the panel rank and
defend it above competing
proposals?**

Proposals are
compared, not
judged in
isolation

Primary
reviewers shape
the first
interpretation

Disciplinary
proximity shapes
which risks look
serious

Limited time
rewards a clear,
repeatable core
argument

Limited budgets
magnify any
remaining
uncertainty

From my own reviewing

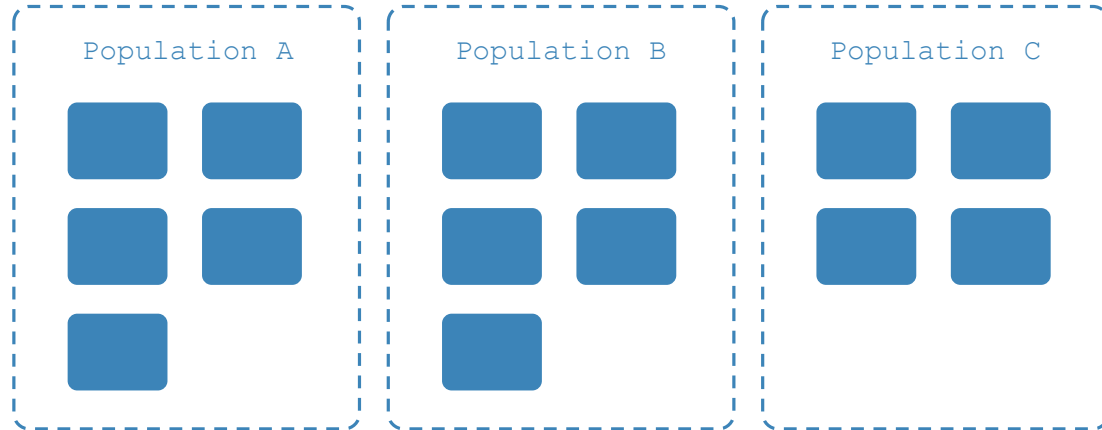
For the DFG and the Dutch and Polish national research councils, I assessed proposals on its merits. The panel then has to compare.

*Not arbitrary, still a
structured human judgment under
competition and uncertainty.*

Why less became more ambitious

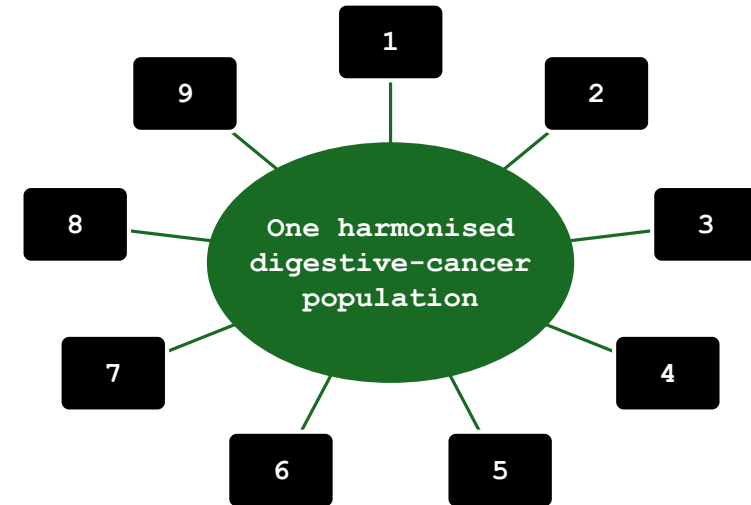
Ambition means depth, integration and shared outputs – not simply breadth.

First submission



Heterogeneous cohorts, partly parallel projects → 14 neighbouring results

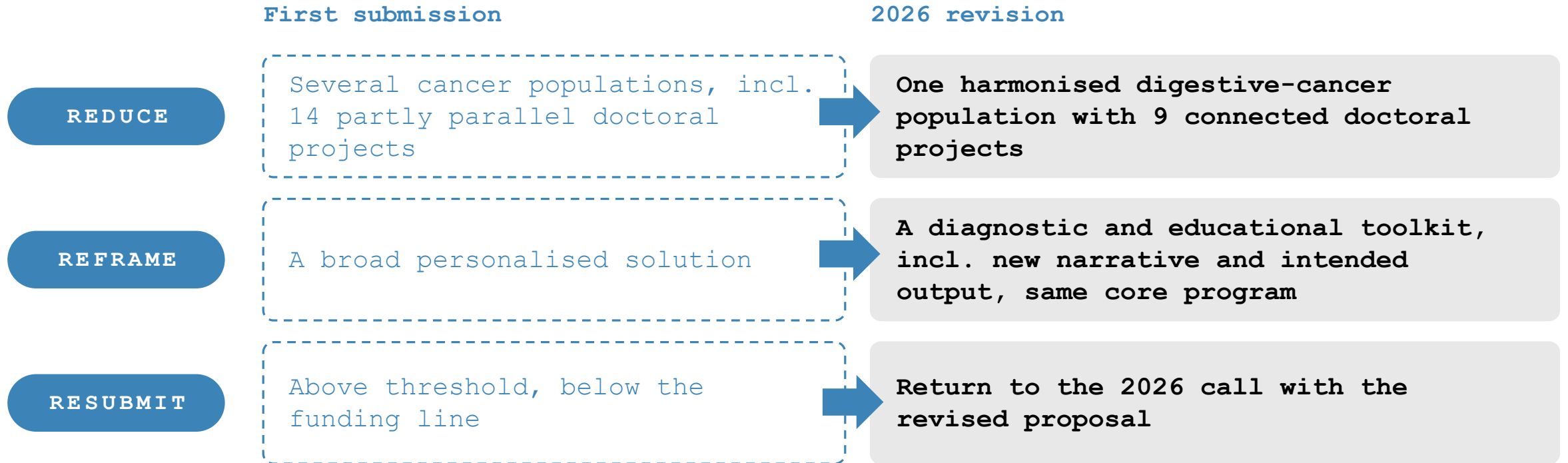
2026 revision



Shared criteria, comparable measurements → one joint result

We reduced the surface area of the proposal so that the scientific integration could become deeper and demonstrable.

Three changes, three decisions



We are currently preparing the resubmission.
I do not know whether these changes will be enough.

A rejection without feedback

Formal decision letter

"The proposal was not assigned the priority required for funding."

96 proposals submitted, no scientific criticism, and no revision path



My message to the consortium

"Unfortunately, we got a rejection of our AIPACA proposal. [...] I think with a review and a study protocol at hand we can still continue => Maybe a bit slower, but there will be other opportunities to attract some funding!"



What I would do differently today

At the time, we did not pursue a debrief. Today, I would try to create the feedback that the letter did not provide.

"I understand the decision is final. Could you help us understand which aspects most limited the proposal's priority, and whether a revised submission would be worthwhile?"



What remained

RECYCLE

Contribution of Synthetic Data Generation towards an Improved Patient Stratification in Palliative Care

Hahn W, ..., Wolfien M. J Pers Med 2022;12(8):1278
published August 2022

Some proposals simply ended

**Most of these proposals were never retired.
They faded away.**

A consortium that does not develop shared ownership before submission rarely develops it after rejection.

Why they faded

The driving coordinator did not take it further

We did not invest in refactoring it ourselves

No matching call came up

The exception: Recycle

Parts of a 2024 proposal reappear, updated, in a current call

RETIRE

Fading is the costly version of retiring: the work is neither ended nor reused. Today I would decide consciously what ends, and which parts we keep.

My five options after a rejection

Before deciding, one needs to understand the feedback. If the written decision is insufficient, reach out.

Resubmit

Improve the proposal and try again

SENSE

Reframe

Change the narrative, scope or intended output

SENSE

Reduce

Develop one coherent, feasible core

SENSE

Recycle

Turn the work into another scientific output

AIPACA

Retire

End the proposal consciously

Several side proposals

Four questions that help me choose

1

Is the feedback actionable?

2

Does the idea still matter to us?

3

Does the work have value outside the proposal?

4

Does someone own the next attempt, and is our role substantial enough?

A personal heuristic, not an established model =>

Resubmit

Reframe

Reduce

Recycle

Retire

**What should happen to the next
invisible entry in your CV?**

The invisible parts of our CVs

1

Which invisible entries in your CV have already reappeared in another form?

2

How do you distinguish useful feedback from preference or noise?

3

When is another submission worthwhile, and when is it better to recycle or retire the idea?